

Trust Crucial in Managing Hotel Employee Satisfaction

The development of trust within a hotel's service climate is crucial in generating employee satisfaction claims **Dr Prakash Chathoth** in a recently published co-authored paper. The researchers argue that hotels need to develop open and fair workplaces in which organisational goals are clearly communicated to ensure favourable employee perceptions. This, they write, "is essential in managing employee satisfaction" and ultimately in enhancing service quality.

The Complexity of Trust

To acknowledge the significance of trust within a hotel, the researchers break it down into the multiple dimensions of integrity, commitment, dependability and competence. Integrity covers both the individual staff member's honesty and truthfulness and the organisation's open-ness and "orientation towards fairness and justice". Commitment indicates how staff members position themselves within the organisation, both in terms of how they feel about it and how they act as part of it.

Dependability takes in "characteristics such as faithfulness, reliability and consistency", and indicates "the vulnerability of one party to the actions of the other party". Once again, this affects the hotel and the staff member in equal measure, but is particularly important in building employee trust. The final dimension, in contrast, relates only to staff and other stakeholder perceptions of the hotel as an organisation able to compete in the market. Competence, write the researchers, generates trust in staff, partners and customers that the organisation can "survive and lead in the marketplace".

Service Climate and Employee Satisfaction

Given the complex interactions that develop trust within an organisation, the researchers argue that an understanding of the service climate within a hotel will allow a better appreciation of how trust affects, and is affected by, employee satisfaction. A service climate is most obviously reflected in the mass of perceptions about the hotel built up by its employees as they experience the organisation in action, and their assumptions about how the hotel's management wants them to behave.

In more specific terms, a service climate encompasses the strategies, support, systems, "rewards and recognition, management service orientation and employee service orientation" in a hotel. Not surprisingly, if employees consider themselves to be working within a good service climate, they are likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

The Study Setting

To determine the extent to which trust, service climate and employee satisfaction interact within hotels, the researchers surveyed four 5-star hotels belonging to major international chains in an Asian metropolis. Of their 77 respondents, 51% were male, 46% were aged between 18 and 25, and 40% had between one and three years of experience in the hotel industry. Another 27% had been in the industry from 3.1 to 5 years. Only 5% had industry work experience of more than 10 years.

This was a fairly youthful sample, sufficiently representative of the industry in general. The respondents tended to be tertiary educated, with 62% holding bachelor degrees and 17% associate degrees. Business, tourism, the arts and the humanities were their main areas

of study. Overall, they seem typical of the sort of employees 5-star hotels would recruit.

Trust at Work

The survey results indicate that the level of trust within a hotel does indeed influence perceptions of its service climate, which in turn affects levels of employee satisfaction. An important implication of this is that hotels can improve how satisfied their employees feel by identifying the most significant aspects of trust and developing strategies to influence them. In order of importance, the researchers suggest that the hotel's integrity, commitment and dependability are most likely to influence employee perceptions.

As the researchers themselves put it, "the better the integrity, commitment and dependability of the organisation as perceived by the employee, the more positive is the perceived trust of the organisation".

Improving these aspects of organisational trust is not difficult. The researchers suggest practical measures such as each hotel "guiding employees in handling challenging situations, developing mentorship programmes, and keeping its promises to help employees feel safe to depend on the organisation". They also note that open and honest communication to all employees, encouraging the same between employees and treating all employees in a fair and just manner will lead to better employee perceptions of the hotel's integrity, and thus enhanced employee satisfaction.

A Good Service Climate is Vital

In terms of service climate, perceptions again determine the level of employee satisfaction. In a finding that reinforces the observations about trust, the researchers note that the most important elements in creating a good service environment in the eyes of employees are, in order, "training, management service orientation, service system and service support, followed by reward, services strategy and employee service orientation".

It is imperative, write the researchers, that hotel management "pays attention to all aspects of service climate in their organisation", and that the development of employee trust in the hotel should again lie at the foundation of such efforts. The objective should be to ensure that employee perceptions of the workplace always lead to satisfaction with being part of the organisation. This, in turn will ensure that employees "serve the customers well".

In the final analysis, employee satisfaction and the trust that support it are matters of effective management. Not only should hotels commit to improving their service climates, conclude the researchers, but they should also be "training their managers and supervisors to understand the significance of trust within an organisational context".

Points to Note:

- Hotel employee satisfaction hinges on trust in the organisation and perceptions of its service climate.
- Trust can be enhanced by improving employee perceptions of the integrity, commitment and dependability of the organisation.
- All aspects of the service climate should be based on displays of trust to enhance employee satisfaction
- Satisfied employees deliver good service.

Chathoth, P. K, Mak, B. Jauhari, V. and Manaktola. (2007). Employees' Perceptions of Organizational Trust and Service Climate: a Structural Model Combining their Effects on Employee Satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 31, 338-357.